

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A computer-implemented method to facilitate controlling spare parts inventory within a manufacturing plant, ~~the manufacturing plant~~ having a number of workstations operating in concert to manufacture a product from supplied materials, wherein the plant maintains an inventory of spare parts to be used in repairing broken down workstations, the workstations relying on the spare parts to operate and the supplied materials to manufacture the product at different locations in the plant, the method comprising:

associating each ~~unit of~~ spare part in the inventory with identification data, [[a]] location data, and operational needs data, the operation needs data representing a quantity of spare part units needed for desired plant manufacturing levels,

storing inventory data at a common base station, the inventory data representing ~~units of each~~ spare parts part in the inventory according to their identification, location, and operational needs data;

transmitting signals representative of a spare parts search request from a user to the base station, the request representing a need to locate a spare part from the spare parts inventory in order to repair a broken down workstation;

processing the signals with the inventory data to obtain a search result, the search result representing the identification and location data for each ~~unit in~~ spare part in the inventory matching the spare parts search request ~~and also an available quantity of the spare part units relative to the quantity of spare part units needed for the desired manufacturing levels;~~ and

transmitting the search results to the user, the search results representing a location for each spare part within the plant.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising decentralizing the spare parts inventory by dispersing the spare parts throughout the different workstation locations in the manufacturing plant, locating and retrieving the dispersed spare parts by transmitting search requests to the base station.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 2 wherein dispersing the spare parts ~~comprises~~ includes checking out the spare parts from a plant crib, the identification and location data associated with the spare parts being updated during the checking out to reflect changing the location of checked out spare part from the plant crib ~~when checked out~~.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising associating vendor data with each spare part, the vendor data stored with the inventory data for representing vendors to be used for purchasing new spare parts, the search result also representing the vendor data.

5. (Original) The method of claim 3 further comprising purchasing new spare parts through a blanket purchase order represented in the vendor data.

6. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 further comprising associating key contact data with each spare part, the key contact data stored with the inventory data for representing persons within the manufacturing plant responsible for controlling removal of spare parts from the ~~work stations~~ work-stations associated with each location data, the search result also representing the key contact data.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising processing in the base station the inventory data for automatically generating a usage report.

8. (Original) The method of claim 7 wherein generating the usage report comprising representing parts needed, the parts need representing only the spare parts having available quantities which are less than the quantity needed for the desired plant manufacturing levels.

9. (Original) The method of claim 7 wherein generating the usage report relates to an excessive usage, the excessive usage representing only the spare parts having available quantities which are greater than the quantity needed for the desired plant manufacturing levels.

10. (Original) The method of claim 7 wherein generating the usage report relates to a historical usage, the historical usage representing usage of the spare parts relative to the operational needs data and a historical period of time.

11. (Original) The method of claim 7 wherein generating the usage report relates to a critical parts list, the critical parts list representing spare parts critical to the operational needs data.

12. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising retrieving a spare part from one of the workstations based on the location data, returning a bar code card to a drop-box for indicating retrieval of the spare part, the bar code card including the identification and location data for the spare part, scanning the bar code card and transmitting signals representing bar code data to the base station, processing the signals for automatically updating in the base station the available quantity of the retrieved spare part.

13. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising storing inventory data for multiple manufacturing plants, transmitting signals representing a plant or global search, the plant search restricted to the plant originating the signals and spare parts located therein, the global plant search including each of the multiple manufacturing plants and spare parts located therein.

14. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the location data includes a plant name, a department name, a workstation location, an operator name, and a drawer position.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14 further comprising transmitting a signal representing a security data with the search request, the security data representing which location data are represented in the search result.

16. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the identification data includes a keyword, a part description, a remark, a manufacturer part number, a vendor part number, a bar code number, a vendor name, a vendor contact link, a unit cost, a critical designation, and a blue print number.

17. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising providing multiple computers within the manufacturing plant, the multiple computers usable by each plant employee for searching for spare parts, each computer includes a graphical user interface to facilitate transmitting and receiving signals from the base station and also to display the search results to the user.

18.-20. (Cancelled)

21. (New) A method of managing separate spare parts and production inventories in an manufacturing plant having a number of workstations that cooperate to produce a product, wherein the spare parts inventory includes spare parts used to repair broken down machines and the production inventory includes materials used by the workstations to produce the product, the method comprising:

managing the production inventory to maintain sufficient quantities of materials to meet forecasted production demands of the workstations; and

managing the spare parts inventor to maintain sufficient quantities of spare parts to meet forecasted workstation brake downs, wherein managing the spare parts inventor includes an electronic process for locating spare parts dispersed throughout the plant from location data assigned to each part at a time of the spare part being checked out from a parts crib used to store the spare parts until use.

22. (New) The method of claim 21 further comprising identifying whether the spare parts checked out from the crib are available for use based on information inputted into a central database when a user checked out the spare part or information collected from the user after using the spare part within one of the workstations, and in response to receiving a request

to locate a particular spare part, indicating a location for each available one more of that particular spare part to correspond with the crib if the crib has the particular spare part available or one or more of the workstations if the spare part is not in use by the one or more workstations.

23. (New) A method of managing direct and indirect inventories in an manufacturing plant having a number of workstations that cooperate to produce a product, wherein the indirect inventory includes spare parts used to repair broken down machines and the direct inventory includes materials used by the workstations to produce the product, the method comprising:

managing the direct inventory to maintain sufficient quantities of materials to meet forecasted production demands of the workstations; and

managing the indirect inventory to maintain sufficient quantities of spare parts to meet forecasted workstation brake downs, wherein managing the spare parts inventor includes:

(i) an electronic process for locating spare parts dispersed throughout the plant from location data assigned to each part at a time of the spare part being checked out from a parts crib used to store the spare parts until use, the electronic process including identifying whether the spare parts checked out from the crib are available for use based on information inputted into a central database when a user checked out the spare part or information collected from the user after using the spare part within one of the workstations, and in response to receiving a request to locate a particular spare part, indicating a location for each available one more of that particular spare part to correspond with the crib if the crib has the particular spare part available or one or more of the workstations if the spare part is not in use by the one or more workstations; and

(ii) an automated process for assessing the need to order additional spare parts to meet the forecasted workstation brake downs, the automated process periodically tabulating the number of spare parts checked out of the crib and not in use, the number of spare parts in the crib, and the number of spare parts needed to meet forecasted workstation break downs, wherein the need to order additional spare parts is determined if the number of spare parts not in use and in the crib is less than the forecasted number of spared parts needed to meet forecasted workstation break downs.